Sympathy and Revulsion in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*

Sara Di Muzio

Oak Park, Illinois

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In a letter to William Godwin dated December 11, 1817, Percy Shelley expresses a sense of his own intuitive understanding of his fellow man. In discussing the kinds of sentiments he wishes to imbue his poetry with so as to reflect an accurate picture of the authorial mind, he writes:

> in this have I long believed that my power consists in sympathy—and that part of imagination which relates to sentiment and contemplation. I am formed, if for anything not in common with the herd of mankind, to apprehend minute and remote distinctions of feeling, whether relative to external nature or the living beings which surround us, and to communicate the conceptions which result from considering either the moral or the material universe as a whole.[1]

Certainly, sentiment and fellow feeling run high in Shelley's poetry, with its spirit of widespread social change and vision of ideal love. His claim of being better able than the average man to understand the finer mechanisms of feeling within the greater portion of humanity is borne out in subtle ways in his writing, through occasions as small as a subconscious contortion of the face or exchanged glances of mutual understanding. I want to think particularly about the way that the darker side of sympathy operates in *Prometheus Unbound*, begun shortly after the writing of Shelley's letter to Godwin, and the way it can sometimes work hand in hand with feelings of revulsion or antipathy. Shelley's Prometheus is a champion for a new world order in which love and other positive sentiments prevail, but the realization of utopia follows hard on the heels of long ages of torture and high disdain. Prometheus retains the kind of sympathy which we may

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[1] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (London: Isaac Pitman & Sons,1909), 574.

imagine first prompted him to intervene on man's behalf, but there is a certain distortion of his sentiments on account of the many revolting displays he has been forced to witness and of the long-held grudge against his captor.

It is this unique position inhabited by one of more than mortal stock which interests me in my project of unravelling Shelley's poetic depictions of sympathetic behavior. Shelley's version of the Prometheus tale imagines Prometheus' captivity in a manner which allows for unique psychological and ethical developments to unfold before readers. Shelley depicts Prometheus' agony and rage with an eye to creating an understanding of the complicated interiority of the gods. Held captive by the king of the gods and surrounded by foul abominations in the form of Furies and spectral visitors, Prometheus displays a tortured disgust that verges into a kind of perverted sympathy. He becomes, if only for a moment or two, something like what he habitually beholds. He is not so inflexible as one might imagine a Titan, forerunner of the gods, to be. He is not set in his ways, and can be guided in his objectives, as Shelley underscores from the drama's outset. Faces have great power, even in this more-than-human realm and indeed, the drama is replete with occasions on which Shelley's characters divine crucial information from the facial expressions of others. This is not to say that Prometheus is not a character of strong conviction—he is certainly a well-chosen emblem of noble resistance to injustice—but I think that Shelley sees him as well-suited to manifesting both a traditional notion of pleasantly kind-hearted sympathy as well as the more psychologically complex version of sympathy which occasionally arises subconsciously from emotions of the unpleasant kind.

Shelley particularly underscores scenes of distorted displays of revulsion and sympathy by highlighting elements of unconscious mimicry. He calls into question the limits of negative sentiment and the manner in which we consider ourselves bound to others of our kind, both

consciously and unconsciously. Imitation, as we know from the well-worn adage, contains elements of affinity, but *Prometheus Unbound* complicates the question by distinguishing between different types of affinity or acknowledgement. In what follows, I will unpack the nuances of the notion of a kind of revulsion that verges into sympathy, and I will explore Shelley's ethical project in depicting such forms of perverted fellow-feeling. Such scenes of evil promoting its likeness are not uncommon in Shelley's writing, and I think it points to an interest in the ways that human/humanoid visages or forms make subconscious demands on their viewers. The idea of collectivity which enables Act IV's realization of a new age of love and joy also draws links between the various subjects under Jupiter's sway, be they detestable or fair in form.

One early and notable occasion on which Prometheus manifests distorted sympathies occurs in Act I on the sudden appearance of the Furies. Their forms are so abominable that the sight of them triggers something like a gag reflex in Prometheus, an intuitive reaction that takes the form of a malicious twisting of the face. As he describes it, presumably while enacting that facial distortion, "Whilst I behold such execrable shapes, / Methinks I grow like what I contemplate, / And laugh and stare in loathsome sympathy."[2] Here we have the crucial notion plainly laid out for us, namely that there is a strong danger of becoming like the beings one looks on. The fact that Prometheus uses the term "execrable shapes" underscores the importance of the visual element here – the Furies are grotesque most of all to *behold*. Such a perversion of the human form as is embodied in the female-avian hybridization of the Furies offends the eye of the onlooker to the point of influencing the rest of the face as well.

[2] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), I. 449-51. Hereafter all quotations of Shelley's poetry are cited parenthetically in the text.

Prometheus presumably cannot bear to enumerate the qualities that make the Furies so disturbing, instead framing the horror of their appearance in terms of its being greater than anything else heretofore conceivable – "Never yet there came / Phantasms so foul through monster-teeming Hell / From the all-miscreative brain of Jove" (I. 446-8). The sight of something so inconceivably foul seems to boggle the mind to the point of affecting the face, the next closest thing to the mind, or the emblem of expression. Though Prometheus has a remarkable ability to steel himself against any manifestation of cruelty and injustice, there seems to be an initial balk which even he cannot hold back. It is as if his subconscious signals to his facial features before the conscious brain can catch up to the wretched sight and distinguish the Fury attitude from the noble stance with which Prometheus positions himself against Jupiter and his underlings. The initial eye/face reception of the objects of his gaze recognizes creatures in some way similar to him, fellow beings which exert a certain influence on his capacity for a range of emotions and expressions.

In his preface to *The Cenci*, Shelley notes that "the most remote and the most familiar imagery may alike be fit for dramatic purposes when employed in the illustration of strong feeling, which raises what is low, and levels to the apprehension that which is lofty, casting over all the shadow of its own greatness."[3] Thinking of "strong feeling" as an element of experience that facilitates transitions and elisions between disparate objects can, I believe, illuminate the seeming incongruity of what is essentially Prometheus briefly descending to the level of the Furies. Growing like what one contemplates is not out of keeping, then, when strong sentiments are provoked by the sight. There is also something like a law of conservation of energy at work in Shelley's depiction of tempestuous sentiment—Prometheus' recantation of his curse leaves

[3] Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 277.

residual pockets of rage and disgust that well up in the face of further provocation like that voiced by the Furies.

Implied in Prometheus' statement that he grows like what he contemplates is the claim that what one is bewildered and disgusted by, one is at risk of imitating, however subconsciously. Regarding a face that resembles one's own, however human-adjacent it may be, makes some demand on one's moral faculties. It is an instinctual sense that one holds some kind of responsibility to other members of one's kind. Upon beholding a display such as that of the Furies cavorting maliciously, one cannot remain uninfluenced. Even one as loftily resistant to threats of torture as Prometheus does not remain unmoved by such a presumable horde of contorted visages. It is an instinctual, emotive response to fellow creatures in a plight worthy of notice. Speaking of subconscious concordance, Prometheus' declaration, "Methinks I grow like what I contemplate" (I.450), is startlingly similar to a line repeated twice in William Blake's *Jerusalem*, namely "they become what they behold."[4] Blake and Shelley, though presumably ignorant of each other's work, and finishing these respective pieces concurrently, both point to the somewhat sinister notion that deformity can impress its likeness subconsciously on its viewers.

It is worth noting here that Shelley's *Prometheus* notebooks contain numerous sketches of eyes and faces. Solitary eyes and pairs of eyes stare out of leaves replete also with fragments of text and merciless edits. Certain pages abound with collections of facial profiles, sometimes retraced and sometimes overlapping. There is something a bit eerie about these profiles—usually they consist of a face without a head, though sometimes Shelley scribbles a mop of hair atop, and they are almost extraterrestrial in their round fulness of forehead, nose, and chin. If nothing else,

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[4] William Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, (London: Trianon Press, 1952), XXVIII.2.

these sketches indicate a concern with individual elements of the visage, if not with the demands of a horde or collective of near-identical creatures. According to Nancy Goslee, these marginal sketches "reflect an interplay or tension between sense-perception and sense as significance. More specifically, from the examples of drawings which both mirror and prompt verbal revisions, Shelley must also have become conscious of the sketches as motifs which reveal symbolic content."[5] Something of the subconscious must have been at work here, as is often the case when one lets one's pen glide across the paper for the sake of pictorial representation while the active mind is engaged in a different task. Even so, the presence of so many eyes and humanoid visages leads me to believe that Shelley was at some level concerned with the demands on the human sympathies of his poetic hero.

In his "Defence of Poetry," Shelley avows a belief in the ability of the craft to act as an agent of self-unveiling and self-recognition. He declares that "The tragedies of the Athenian poets are as mirrors in which the spectator beholds himself, under a thin disguise of circumstance, stript of all but that ideal perfection and energy which every one feels to be the internal type of all that he loves, admires, and would become."[6] Not only does the average spectator instinctively recognize something of his own self in the goings-on of the stage—he is, for a time, able to tap into a collective conception of the ideal mode of life. I think something like an inverted version of this process happens to Prometheus in Act I of *Prometheus Unbound*. When he beholds the spectacle of the Furies, which he seems to regard as something in the realm of tragedy, provoking the sympathetic faculties, he struggles to detach himself from the horde. He cannot help but see something of himself in the demoniacal mass, and vice versa, but it is the

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[5] Nancy Moore Goslee, "Shelley at Play: A Study of Sketch and Text in His 'Prometheus' Notebooks," in *Huntington Library Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 3, 1985, 214.
[6] Percy Bysshe Shelley, *Shelley's Prose, Or the Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. David Lee Clark (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 285.

process of detachment that requires effort and claims importance. Rather than see an ideal version of what he might become, he suddenly realizes as though from without himself that the contortions of his face mimic those of his deriders, that he is in danger of uniting himself with the loathed spectacle. The instinct in both cases is to align oneself with the mass whose activity is in perfect accord with some inner sense of collective morality and purpose, but for Prometheus, as the spectator of a performance whose author's "all-miscreative brain" (I.448) proffers a mockery of "ideal perfection and energy"[7], the task is one of bearing a sense of proud individuality up against the mirror's vision.

The ethics of beholding a spectacle are tied up in our capacities for fellow feeling. As Shelley notes, "the imagination is enlarged by a sympathy with pains and passions so mighty, that they distend in their conception the capacity of that by which they are conceived."[8] The kind of sympathy which relates the self to the collective body one knows oneself to be a part of goes into overdrive during the spectating of a tragedy. Beholding the manner in which members of humanity are apt not only to be beset by all manner of injustice and misfortune, but also to bear up under such adversity does something to the receptive faculties which merits illustration in the form of a subconscious mimicry of the spectacle beheld. We must remember that Aristotle delineates dramatic poetry as a form of imitation. Indeed, the language of mimicry abounds in theatrical verbiage. "Pantomime," "masque," "play," etc. are all terms that evoke the recollection that the dramatic form finds its basis in an imitation of the most elemental as well as the most outlandish facets of life. Additionally, the wearing of literal masks bearing distorted and grotesquely exaggerated expressions was common practice in ancient Greek theater, a sort of manner of prodding the audience's reactions.

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[7] Shelley, *Shelley's Prose*, 285.
[8] *Ibid.*

Shelley also notes the role of mimesis in poetic achievement in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*. The precision with which he situates himself among his predecessors and notes the recycling and re-presentation that goes into creation enables him, according to Laura Claridge, to "cast the principle of repetition (as well as the inheritance of tradition) into form itself, whereby an *appearance* of mastery is available to lesser talents on the principle of imitation alone."[9] Calling as it does to Aeschylus and Milton, *Prometheus Unbound* is, in its most overt manifestations, engaging questions of imitation and sympathy.

Shelley's "Defence" goes on to remark that "neither the eye nor the mind can see itself, unless reflected upon that which it resembles."[10] This declaration calls to mind Prometheus' moment of startled self-realization, of coming back to his sense of bodily control after subconsciously mimicking the distorted features of the Furies. It is a shocking thing to realize that one has allowed some aspect of facial command to lapse, to notice that some part of one is acting as if of its own accord. In beholding a similar entity, the critical eye revolves backwards to gaze on its own abode. Shelley's statements regarding a spectator's self-conception sound much like a precursor to 20th century psychoanalytic thought, something akin to Lacanian notions of the mirror stage and Otherness. Earl Wasserman sounds out Shelley's delineation between "self-knowledge" and "self-anatomy"—the latter being a deeply misleading process illustrated by the prelate Orsino in *The Cenci* as an undertaking which "shall teach the will / Dangerous secrets: for it tempts our powers, / Knowing what must be thought, and may be done, / Into the depth of darkest purposes" (II.111-3). There are different manners in which one may turn the eye inward—the kind that Orsino points us to springs from an all too human apprehension of the

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[9] Laura Claridge, *Romantic Potency: The Paradox of Desire* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 132.
[10] Shelley, *Shelley's Prose*, 285.

darkest possibilities open to the human mind and will. Wasserman puts the struggle between self-knowledge and self-anatomy thus:

> Because of the defect in the human constitution, at some level of his mind man must, if incited, feel such emotions as revenge and sensuality; but self-knowledge reveals that the will, by stoically sublimating them, can prevent their entering consciousness, where they would act as irresistible motives.[11]

The pertinence of this kind of stoic sublimation to Prometheus' situation is undeniable—indeed, Shelley interrupted his composition of Act III of *Prometheus Unbound* to work on *The Cenci*. The two plays both treat the subject of bearing up under enormous injustice, but where Prometheus exercises the kind of forbearance that makes him fit, as Shelley declares in his preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, to be a poetic hero, Beatrice's succumbence to plots of vengeance renders her plight a subject for tragedy.

Prometheus Ubound and *The Cenci* also bear comparison on the level of distorted sympathy and abominable mimicry. When Cenci curses his daughter Beatrice for her disobedience, he wishes on her

> A hideous likeness of herself, that as
> From a distorting mirror she may see
> Her image mixed with what she most abhors,
> Smiling upon her from her nursing breast! (IV.146-9)

There is an element of Freudian *unheimlich* at work here—the familiar and unfamiliar blended in a loathsome farrago. Sympathy and revulsion operate in close proximity in Shelley's *Cenci*, in which the traditional family structure becomes distorted irretrievably and strains emotions like

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[11] Earl Reeves Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 111.

love and hatred to the fraying point. This passage in particular ties the play in with the ethical project that I perceive Shelley to have been exploring in *Prometheus Unbound*. The oftentimes inseparable mixture of negative sentiment with a kind of undeniable affinity is crucial to a narrative of familial breakdown, and especially to the scope of tragedy. The relationships in *The Cenci* are of a nature evolving from sympathy or affinity to a hatred which permits of the most virulent forms of vengeance. Prometheus endures three thousand years not only of torture, but of rage and hatred towards his tormentors. The play begins with a declaration of newfound equanimity, but Prometheus, as discussed previously, has moments of suffering-born kinship which must be unlearned. To return to Cenci's curse on his daughter, however, the most incisive aspect of the invective is its desire to inflict a kind of ever-growing revulsion impossible to separate from the demands of the sympathetic faculties.

Beatrice espouses a similar sentiment to that of her fellow dramatic hero when, in her madness, she betrays a sense of an identity lost in the magnitude of the crime committed against her. There is a desire to be something other than oneself that comes with the onslaught of mental and physical duress. When she declares, "Do you know / I thought I was that wretched Beatrice / Men speak of" (III.43-5), she points to a double awareness of a self amid a collective which *speaks*, which declares an opinion. She has been alienated from that self, yet there remains the consciousness of how that self pertains to the collective. Lucretia further points to a connection between likeness and the gaze when she tells Beatrice "Thou art unlike thyself; thine eyes shoot forth / A wandering and strange spirit" (III.81-2). The same eyes that shoot forth one's own spirit are the agents of sympathetic registration. This "strange spirit" is in stark contrast to the Beatrice that the Cardinal describes in Act I, whose "sweet looks, which make all things else / Beauteous and glad, might kill the fiend within you" (I.44-5), in a reversal of the evil demanding a

reflection of itself that we see in *Prometheus Unbound*. And when later Beatrice refers to herself as "I, whose thought / Is like a ghost shrouded and folded up / In its own formless horror" (III.109-11), she indicates a process somehow like an internal version of Prometheus' cringing expression—her mind's visage feels itself contort in the face of an attempt to grapple with a horrendous prospect. Beatrice's sense of her own distortions calls back to a moment in Act I of the play, wherein she rebukes her father and enjoins him to conceal himself:

> But ill must come of ill. Frown not on me!
>
> Haste, hide thyself, lest with avenging looks
>
> My brother's ghosts should hunt thee from thy seat!
>
> Cover thy face from every living eye,
>
> And start if thou but hear a human step;
>
> Seek out some dark and silent corner— (I.151-6)

In claiming that "ill must come of ill," Beatrice separates herself from Prometheus, but her phrasing is helpful for understanding the mimicry that I understand Shelley as believing evil calls to itself. And by commanding Count Cenci to hide himself from "every living eye," Beatrice not only infringes on the paternal privileges, but also intimates that seeing and *being* seen are deeply aligned with the antipathy/sympathy process. Wasserman also draws links between *The Cenci* and *Prometheus Unbound* on the basis of their manifestations of paternal tyranny and its unsettlement. Indeed, reading the oppression of Jupiter in *Prometheus Unbound* as the exercise of a Foucauldian sovereign power that reserves the right to take life but also operates creatively (or miscreatively, as the case may be) can illuminate Prometheus' inclination towards sympathy for the creatures born of an evil mind.

Important to ask here is the question of whether Prometheus is more god or man. Strictly speaking, he is a Titan, one of the elder immortals. Some versions of the Prometheus myth credit him as man's creator, shaping his progeny out of clay. Either way, his crime is an act of benevolence towards mankind. He aligns himself with humanity in a manner which earns him eternal punishment. In spirit, then, it seems he is more like a human than a god. His sense of mercy seems to be more finely tuned than that of Jupiter. Certainly, Shelley draws out the thread of Prometheus' ethical superiority over Jupiter, situating them on opposite sides of the moral spectrum when in the Preface he claims to have been averse to "reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind."[12] With elements both of humanity and godliness, then, Prometheus is in a unique position to serve as Shelley's perfect revolutionary and to delineate human sentiments elevated to the most noble pitches. As Shelley himself puts it, Prometheus is "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends."[13]

One of Harold Bloom's readings of *Prometheus Unbound*'s epigraph centers around the principles of Stoic philosophy, which I think can shed some light on this question of distorted sympathy. As Bloom puts it, "the epigraph is both pridefully stoic and deliberately impious, a defiance of the sky god Zeus… On the stoic side Prometheus is to be contrasted with those like the unhappy Dionysius, who cannot bear pain and yield to it, confessing its reality as an evil."[14] According to Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*, the apostrophe to Amphiaraus is actually intended as a call to the Stoic Zeno, whose disciple Dionysius of Heraclea infamously gave over his teaching regarding the indifference of pain upon the onset of kidney troubles. On beholding this

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[12] Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 205.
[13] *Ibid.*
[14] Harold Bloom, *Shelley's Mythmaking* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969), 47.

renunciation, says Cicero, fellow Stoic Cleanthes uttered the phrase which forms the epigraph of *Prometheus Unbound*: "Audisne haec, Amphiarae, sub terram abdite?" Cicero asserts that this address to the oracle god Amphiaraus, sealed beneath the earth through Jupiter's intervention at the battle of the seven against Thebes, is really meant for Zeno's hearing in the realm of the dead. One of Bloom's interpretations of the epigraph sees Shelley as proffering his Prometheus as a Stoic that Cleanthes might be proud of, might call Zeno to witness as an upholder rather than deserter of the Stoic tenets.

The way in which Shelley himself describes his hero lines up with these Stoic ideals—a few of the qualities he enumerates are Prometheus' "courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force,"[15] qualities which set him apart from Milton's Satan, the only literary entity to which he can be compared. As a character with a philosophical agenda, however, he bears comparison to the class of Stoics who hold fast in their convictions regardless of material circumstance. Bloom remarks that "Shelley's Titan is to endure to the end, and the prideful epigraph calls upon Zeno, as the hero of stoic endurance, to bear witness to this, even as Cleanthes in Cicero invokes Zeno under the name of Amphiaraus, to realize Dionysius' desertion of stoic principle."[16] Prometheus' ability to withstand physical pain and decry the evil embodied by Jupiter renders him worthy of the appellation to the dead Stoic.

Certainly, Prometheus is a champion of endurance under conditions of monstrous torture, with an aplomb that a true Stoic would sanction, but I think Shelley means to lend his hero a touch of sentiment that is not perfectly in line with Stoic ideals. Prometheus is not aloof – he is susceptible to negative influences, he grows like what he contemplates. He boldly rejects the possibility of his captor's torture being able to lay him low—indeed, he laughingly tells the

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[15] Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 205.
[16] Bloom, 47-8.

Furies to "Pour forth the cup of pain" (1.474). Yet, though he maintains that "Pain is my element" (1.477), he reviles the gruesome spectacle of the Furies, and even takes his loathing one step further, into the realm of sympathy. He meets their taunts with a remarkably understanding reply: "I weigh not what ye do, but what ye suffer, / Being evil. Cruel was the power which called / You, or aught else so wretched, into light" (1.480-2). He is a dutiful Stoic in resolutely ignoring his own pain, but he mixes his loathing for evil with sentiments that recognize pain's capacity to be effective and detrimental.

In pointing to the Furies' suffering, Prometheus once again aligns himself with them, in their shared state as creatures subjected to agonies by the ruler of the gods. The manner in which the Furies handle this suffering is revolting to him, but this is a certain kind of revulsion that verges into the sense of a shared condition. In expressing this twisted sense of sympathy for the Furies, Prometheus may be said to be expressing a certain kind of roundabout self-pity. Pity for creatures in one's own plight is curiously both selfless and self-serving in its concern for the suffering of others and, by extension, recognition of one's own pain. I do not mean to suggest that Prometheus is in any way lacking "courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force,"[17] but there seems to be an internal struggle in which, perhaps, some vestiges of Prometheus' attitude pre-opening monologue (in which he renounces disdain) struggle for recognition, as we will see below.

To return to the topic of Prometheus as Stoic, however, the question of how to behave in the face of another's pain is an important one in the school of thought. Certainly, one should not on any account admit one's own experience of pain to be an evil, but does that extend to the experience of beholding others in torment? Epictetus remarks on the issue thus:

[17] Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 205.

> When you see anyone weeping in grief because his son has gone abroad, or is dead, or because he has suffered in his affairs, be careful that the appearance may not misdirect you. Instead, distinguish within your own mind, and be prepared to say, "It's not the accident that distresses this person., because it doesn't distress another person; it is the judgment which he makes about it." As far as words go, however, don't reduce yourself to his level, and certainly do not moan with him. Do not moan inwardly either.[18]

Prometheus' declarations of pity and contortions of the face would probably not, then, carry much weight with Epictetus, but it does not appear that he means to frown entirely on the experience of fellow-feeling. Important to note is that both Epictetus' *Enchiridion* and *Discourses* begin with attempts to delineate those things that are in our control from those that are not. "Opinion, pursuit, desire, aversion, and, in a word, whatever are our own actions"[19] are facets of the self over which we can exert control, while "body, property, reputation, command, and, in one word, whatever are not our own actions"[20] are outside our control. The physical body of Prometheus is central to our understanding of the legend—the fact of his being consigned to have his liver eaten daily by Jupiter's eagle is what sticks in the collective memory above all. While the eagle does not perform its liver-eating duty in Shelley's drama, the body of Prometheus is still very much fraught with a human ability to break down and experience suffering. The liver, we must remember, was considered by the ancient Greeks to be the repository of human emotion. So, the fact that this great Titan, reduced to having the emblem of his humanity devoured daily, still maintains mental poise enough to express both unconcern for

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[18] Epictetus, *The Enchiridion*, tr. Thomas W. Higginson (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1948), 16.
[19] *Ibid.*, 1.
[20] *Ibid.*

his own pain and pity for others beset by Jupiter seems to me something of a meeting point between Stoic blitheness and Shelleyan sympathy.

Seneca's *De Clementia* also touches on the topic of regarding another's experience of pain, prescribing a beneficent attitude of aloofness. Seneca declares that "the wise man will not feel pity, because this cannot happen to a man unless his mind is disturbed. He will do willingly and highmindedly all that those who feel pity are wont to do; he will dry the tears of others, but will not mingle his own with them."[21] So the wise man will not feel pity, but he will *act* in a manner that suggests he feels pity. Seneca continues, "He will not show or feel any disgust at a man's having withered legs, or a flabby wrinkled skin, or supporting his aged body upon a staff; but he will do good to those who deserve it, and will, like a god, look benignantly upon all who are in trouble. Pity borders upon misery: it is partly composed of it and partly derived from it."[22] Self-control is pivotal to the Stoics, so it is likely they would not lend much weight to subconscious actions, but I think that Shelley wants us to notice said closeness of pity and misery, and the way that they mingle in the subconscious. Jacob Risinger remarks that "Integral to the cosmopolitanism that often went hand-in-hand with Stoicism, the self-mastery exhibited by Prometheus is effectively democratized… Tyranny is replaced by self-rule, but all of this justice and wisdom does not result in the cold transcendence of human nature."[23] This kind of democratic Stoicism with an eye to the elements of humanity that are not possible to sublimate is crucial to the drama's depiction of the road to utopia.

Prometheus exhibits an ability to change his disposition from the first. Even his opening monologue marks a shift from resentment to pity. "Disdain! Ah, no! I pity thee. What ruin / Will

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[21] Seneca, *De Clementia*, tr. Aubrey Stewart (London: George Bell and Sons, 1900), II.6
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] Jacob Risinger, *Stoic Romanticism and the Ethics of Emotion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 19.

hunt thee undefended through the wide Heaven!... I speak in grief, / Not exultation, for I hate no more, / As then ere misery made me wise" (1.53-8). As Stuart M. Sperry puts it, "Pity, one may argue, is only a first, imperfect approach to the higher love Prometheus can never achieve until his reunion with Asia. Still, it is curious to find a love born out of its opposite, out of contempt."[24] Here we have, albeit in a slightly different form, feelings of distaste verging into a kind of understanding. Prometheus does not explain why he has thus resolved to hate no longer or what prompted his new compassionate attitude, but he gives the impression of long suffering, suffering to the point of letting go of past grievances. Prometheus' punishment is supposedly eternal, but his state of mind is not. He is changeable, he can be swayed. This early episode sets the stage, so to speak, for Prometheus to find himself revolted to the point of sympathy by the Furies' display.

Shelley seems to be playing with the idea of there being a certain breaking point at which strong emotions can transform into their antitheses. A "love born out of its opposite… contempt"[25] is not inconceivable to one in extreme conditions—after all, torture is often calculated to elicit some kind of mental as well as physical shift in its victim. A certain kind of broken resignation is expected as a matter of course by the punisher. Of course, Prometheus does not evince any kind of capitulation, but the situation takes its toll. As he puts it himself, "misery made [him] wise" (I.58). The three thousand years prior to the commencement of Act I seem to have been full of sameness and repetition, but eternity is not unchanging for the immortals. On one level, eternity can be said, when it is so full of sameness, to become its own imitation. When something becomes rote, it is a mere mockery of what it originally was. Freud speaks of

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[24] Stuart M. Sperry, "Necessity and the Role of the Hero in Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound*," in *PMLA*, vol. 96, no. 2, 1981, 242.
[25] Sperry, 242.

repetition as an act of forgetting and repression. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, he draws out the additional significance of repetition as a child's coming to terms with loss and as a symptom of a fate neurosis. Something of this kind is at work in Prometheus' great renunciation that opens Act I of the drama.

Rage and thirst for vengeance only serve Prometheus until a certain point. It is his newfound capacity for broad-minded sympathy and pity, as well as his capacity to verbalize that magnanimity, that separates him from the Prometheus of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*. Prolonged affliction brings about changes in its subjects, be they forerunners of the gods. This kind of openness to exploring changeability is almost like a prerequisite of beginning a story of this kind past the point at which the original Greek legend finds its ending. Presumably, the Furies have been tormenting Prometheus in a similar manner for untold stretches of time before Act I of Shelley's drama opens and presents the tormentor/tormented dynamic to us. And yet Prometheus persists in his disdain towards Jupiter's displays of force until the moment of *our* first beholding him, when he embraces sentiments notably more positive.

I think Shelley sought to open the drama with a marked commentary on the ability of change to persist even in the bleak landscape of endless punishment, the point past which there should not be much to say. When in Act III Prometheus looks forward to a new home with Asia, "Where we will sit and talk of time and change / As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged" (III.III.23-4), he expresses that unique relationship between sameness and mutability that makes up Shelley's vision of eternity. For Prometheus to be unbound, there has to be a willingness to believe that the world can be made anew, made after a truly good fashion for the first occasion in all the long years of time and existence. Indeed, this conception of eternity as inhering with possibility for positive growth seems to be pivotal for Shelley's utopian project.

So, when Prometheus finds himself semi-subconsciously mimicking the loathsome creatures he beholds while chained to his crag, do his grimaces point to the ability of evil deeds to bend their victims in insidious ways, or do they enable Shelley to champion his chosen hero as a student of evolving sympathies? Prometheus paves the way for the advent of a new, utopian age, in which only finer feelings prevail, so it seems like the negative experiences are set forth in service of an ultimate ideal of fellow feeling.

Prometheus' desire to hear his own curse recited, coming on the heels of his abjuration, has been seen by critics as indicative of a more gradual change of attitude than Prometheus would have us believe. Susan Hawk Brisman argues that "the end of Act I proves just as important as the beginning in showing how a language representing Prometheus' continuing resistance to Jupiter can emerge from the earlier language of rebellion and develop new symbols for the sympathetic operations of the Titan's mind."[26] The process of recognizing where one's sympathies lie is an involuted one, and I think Shelley points to nonlinguistic elements of this process when he involves instances of physical mimicry. In the act of desiring to hear his curse uttered once more, Prometheus espouses a Freudian memory-based impulse to repeat. When he declares, "Though I am changed so that aught evil wish / Is dead within; although no memory be / Of what is hate, let them not lose it now! / What was that curse?" (I.70-3), his pronouncement contains the desire for one final repetition, lest too much has been forgotten (in which case it might not be wise to follow through with the recantation). Though he is certain on the point that no memory of hate remains, the subsequent episode of the encounter with the Furies proffers a situation in which *muscle* memory takes over and forms a likeness of the manifestations of evil around him.

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[26] Susan Hawk Brisman, "'Unsaying His High Language': The Problem of Voice in 'Prometheus Unbound,'" in *Studies in Romanticism*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1977, 51.

When the Earth responds to Prometheus' wish to hear his curse repeated, she first betrays a resistance to speaking or hearing the "dreadful words" (I.185). Upon a second urging, she resorts to a speech filled with the language of doubleness:

> The Magus Zoroaster, my dead child,
> Met his own image walking in the garden.
> That apparition, sole of men, he saw.
> For know that there are two worlds of life and death:
> One that which thou beholdest; but the other
> Is underneath the grave, where do inhabit
> The shadows of all forms that think and live,
> Till death unite them and they part no more (I.192-9).

The implication here is that everyone has a corresponding double in the shadow realm. And when the Phantasm of Jupiter speaks, the occasion draws a link between Prometheus' former language, the object against which that speech had been directed, and an alter ego. Zoroaster has, first of men, been allowed to see this shadow version of himself, but the ability to behold beings from that other realm has been afforded to Prometheus as well, perhaps in the intensity of his insistence on hearing the curse in order to renounce it. Shelley himself can also be said to have "met his own image"—he had repeated visions of a doppelgänger, including shortly before his death, and Mary even recorded instances wherein friends of the Shelleys independently witnessed this double of Percy.

Something like a shadowy doubleness operates in Prometheus' encounter with the Furies, during which a kind of penumbral version of Prometheus rises to the fore. The mocking, snarling Prometheus that faces the cavorting spectacle is not of the same mind as the being who nobly

renounces wrathful sentiment. To return to the Phantasm of Jupiter's utterance, however, the act of hearing one's words in the voice of another (the phantasm of one's enemy, at that) is, for Prometheus, in itself a confrontation with the self. Even before the phantasm speaks, Prometheus reads the visage of the shadow being as a mirror of his own at the time of the initial recitation: "I see the curse on gestures proud and cold, / And looks of firm defiance, and calm hate, / And such despair as mocks itself with smiles, / Written as on a scroll" (I.258-61). "Calm hate" and "loathsome sympathy" seem to me related pairings—they evoke the possibility of antithetical emotions making space for a mixture. The language of mockery towards negative sentiments, too, paves the way for an informed reading of Prometheus' reaction to the Furies. Faces are easily legible for Shelley. By virtue of being sentimental creatures who have a broad range of emotional experience, Shelley's poetic figures are able to recognize the play of emotion on the faces of others. James C. Evans concludes from this kind of scroll-reading that "clearly in such a world of the mind as *Prometheus Unbound* presents, to perceive is to give form to the potentiality of the mind's creations."[27] Something of the interior is reflected in the objects that filter into the mind from without.

Shelley's preface to *Prometheus Unbound* can offer us some insight into what he thought of the play of outside forces on man's consciousness. In it, he writes:

> A poet is the combined product of such internal powers as modify the nature of others, and of such external influences as excite and sustain these powers; he is not one, but both. Every man's mind is, in this respect, modified by all the objects of Nature and art; by

[27] James C. Evans, "Masks of the Poet: A Study of Self-Confrontation in Shelley's Poetry," in *Keats-Shelley Journal*, vol. 24, 1975, 76.

> every word and every suggestion which he ever admitted to act upon his consciousness; it is the mirror upon which all forms are reflected and in which they compose one form.[28]

While not a very Stoic sentiment, this assertion illuminates certain ways in which we see Prometheus process external stimuli. His mind is modified indeed—the objects and entities around him, while not part of Nature in the way that we humans experience it, sort of make their influence felt in understated ways. The fact that Asia, Panthea, and Prometheus have this ability to read truth in each other's eyes without the use of words indicates a strong belief in the capacity to register the world's important messages through simple encounter in something like a process of mental ventilation.

Act II's portrayal of the curious interchange of information between Asia and Panthea calls into question any facial ability to conceal the effects of one's individual experience. When Asia exhorts her sister to "lift / Thine eyes, that I may read his written soul" (II.109-10), she expresses an impatience that cannot be satisfied by traditional verbal communication, but only by a transference of impressed experience. What Panthea has beheld, Asia can behold in kind, but only in the act of locking eyes. Her demand is a variation on Prometheus' own desire to hear his curse repeated aloud, outside the locus of internal recollection. It is worth noting that the word "pupil," as in the dark aperture in the center of the iris, derives from the Latin word *pupa*, meaning "girl" or "doll." This derivation is thought to be a result of the experience of beholding oneself in miniature when gazing into the eyes of another—in other words, seeing oneself as a kind of puppet or doll in the darkened center of an interlocutor's eye. Inherent in the very notion of ocular composition, then, is the idea of another finding some semblance of self therein.

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[28] Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 206.

This interpretation is what Panthea points to when she insists that Asia will see nothing but her "own fairest shadow imaged" (II.113) in her, Panthea's, eyes. This intimation is reminiscent of a passage in an essay of Shelley's on love, in which he proffers a vision of a self in miniature:

> We dimly see within our intellectual nature a miniature as it were of our entire self, yet deprived of all that we condemn or despise, the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man. Not only the portrait of our external being but an assemblage of the minutest particles of which our nature is composed; a mirror whose surface reflects only the forms of purity and brightness, a soul within our soul that describes a circle around its proper paradise which pain, and sorrow, and evil dare not overleap.[29]

This statement reads almost like an inversion of Beatrice's maddened speech in Act III of *The Cenci*, wherein she manifests a pessimistic belief in the imaginative powers of humanity when she declares that "worse [deeds] have been conceived / Than ever there was found a heart to do" (III.I.53-4). There is also a concentricity at work in Shelley's vision of the ideal self within the imperfect self, like the various orbs that make up the human eye.

When Asia drinks deep of Panthea's gaze, she presumably sees not only a miniature version of herself, but also a true account of what we know to have been experienced by Prometheus in Act I. Importantly, Asia's eye-reading process is a process of *searching*—the longer spent sustaining the search, the more is revealed. On first meeting her sister's eyes, Asia merely remarks on their likeness to "the deep, blue, boundless heaven / Contracted to two circles… dark, far measureless, / Orb within orb, and line through line inwoven" (II.114-7).

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[29] Shelley, *Shelley's Prose*, 170.

What she sees at first is the simple outlines of the eye, its circular regularity interspersed with linear filaments, reflecting the outer world, in a surface-level sympathy with the blue skies above.

But presently "There is a change; beyond their inmost depth / I see a shade, a shape: 't is He, arrayed / In the soft light of his own smiles" (II.119-21): that which has been incorporated can once again be brought forth in its original image, enabled by a process of deep sympathy. A deeper search reveals not only that which pertains to the self, but that which links self with a plurality of others. This is the self in miniature to which Shelley refers in his essay on love—the self deprived of aught that is reprehensible by the act of loving another. So, when Asia sees her beloved in the camcorder-like eyes of her sister, it also reveals to her something of the ideal world that is to come. Vision follows vision, and it leads to a collective experience—Asia and Panthea are united in the vision of Prometheus and in the receipt of a message. Panthea recounts it thus: "I looked, and all the blossoms were blown down; / But on each leaf was stamped, as the blue bells / Of Hyacinth tell Apollo's written grief, / Oh, follow, follow!" (II.138-41). The message is imprinted on the world as the visions that Asia reads are imprinted somewhere in the depths of her sister's eyes. While there is not exactly a danger of being subsumed in the experience of Panthea, yet there is a strong integration of selfhood going on here. Everywhere messages are legible: the task is to attend to the ones that have "truth, virtue, love, genius, or joy / That maddening wine of life" (II.III.6-7) at their heart.

Here, Shelley reminds us that sympathy is not possible without imagination. In order to feel *with* another, one must be able to understand that other's experience, whether that be through visualization or through remembrance of similar suffering. When Prometheus finds himself somehow aping the expressions of the Furies, the link between the two parties is

composed of shared torment at the hands of Jupiter. Asia and Panthea lift the bonds of sympathy to a higher and more noble register—an elevation which recalls Shelley's talk of lifting and settling in his *Cenci* preface.

Robert Browning's "Essay on Shelley" proves how few treatments of that poet can neglect to mention his extraordinary powers of sympathy: "Such sympathy with his kind was evidently developed in him to an extraordinary and even morbid degree, at a period when the general intellectual powers it was impatient to put in motion, were immature or deficient."[30] I am interested in the "morbid degree" to which Shelley brought his natural gift of sympathy. Here Browning is referencing some lines from *Julian and Maddalo*, in which Maddalo describes himself as one who feels acutely all the otherwise unnoticed pain of the world, regarding them as descriptive of the author himself. For Maddalo, this kind of receptivity engenders near-constant agony. We know from Shelley's letter to Godwin that he did indeed think of himself as finely tuned in terms of sympathetic capacities, that he felt like a taut nerve vibrating to pitches unheard by others, to borrow his own metaphor from *Julian and Maddalo*. I think what Browning is pointing to in reference to Shelley's sensibilities and their morbidity is his tendency to warp sentiment in the very strength of his feeling. Taken to its utmost, sympathy can easily give rise to sentiments of a different sort, and it can also err one into sympathy of a misguided sort, something like what Prometheus almost falls into with his snarling mimicry and must work to extricate himself from. Browning further gestures to this kind of warped sympathy when he declares, "I shall say what I think,—had Shelley lived he would have finally ranged himself with the Christians; his very 'hate of hate,' which at first mistranslated itself into delirious Queen Mab

[30] Robert Browning, *Robert Browning: The Poems*, ed. John Pettigrew (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 1009.

notes and the like, would have got clearer-sighted by exercise."[31] The "hate of hate" is an illustrative concept, to my mind, given the double negative and the manner in which it underscores a slippage between the sentiment felt and the object it is directed against. This sort of feeling is what Prometheus betrays upon renouncing a desire for vengeance—the experience of beholding evil beings suffering under evil circumstances provokes a leering kind of mockery that quickly recollects itself and withdraws into dignified pity.

While *Prometheus Unbound* ranges on the more virulent end of Shelley's un-Christian writings, Browning's claim rings true in the sense that Shelley's sentiments do seem to have undergone a refinement between what Browning calls the "delirious" days of the *Queen Mab* notes and the period that saw the composition of *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci*. In those same notes to *Queen Mab*, a section which would later be published under the title "A Vindication of Natural Diet," Shelley speaks of a "young enthusiast, the ardent devotee of truth and virtue, the pure and passionate moralist," who strives to embrace a system of honor and nobility of mind: "unless custom has turned poison into food, he will hate the brutal pleasures of the chase by instinct; it will be a contemplation full of horror, and disappointment to his mind, that beings capable of the gentlest and most admirable sympathies should take delight in the death-pangs and last convulsions of dying animals."[32] I think we can see something like a successor of this "ardent devotee of truth and virtue" in Shelley's Prometheus—a being whose mind is filled with anguish at the malicious jubilation of creatures having something in common with his own self, and with unadulterated joy at the advent of the new, maskless age of harmony. Indeed, Prometheus' vision is remarkably clear-sighted, as when he looks forward with Asia to an endless future "Where we will sit and talk of time and change, / As the world ebbs and flows,

[31] Browning, 1009-10.
[32] Shelley, *Poetical Works*, 834.

ourselves unchanged" (III.III.23-4). The parameters of utopia are outlined in startling specificity in Acts III and IV of the drama, offering a heartening glimpse into the sometimes frenetic concatenation of Shelley's ideals.

I think Shelley's conception of a sympathy that recognizes even those beings given over to evil flavors of something akin to Coleridge and Wordsworth's One Life philosophy. Though Coleridge and Shelley never met, the older poet expressed regret at the missed opportunity of mentoring the young Shelley and correcting his atheistic notions. Each poet remained aware of the other's work, and indeed, critics frequently read certain Shelley poems as responses to Coleridge's work. Coleridge's belief in the interconnectedness of all things certainly sprang from religious devotion, but it also served as a consolatory philosophy, a kind of relief from the pressures of individuality. Lucy Newlyn describes this as "the breaking free from self that can come through a perception of the One Life."[33] The elision of self in the face of an interrelated mass can indeed be assuaging when the unifying spirit is a benevolent one, as is Coleridge's. But it is shocking to Prometheus to find himself drawn into the actions of the malignant horde, when the subconscious operations of his face bubble up to the conscious mind. Michael O'Neill writes that "it is possible to contend that Shelley diverges from Coleridge by emphasizing the gap between poetic utterance and non-linguistic reality."[34] I think something like an emphasis on that gap takes place in the moment wherein Prometheus becomes like what he beholds, though he has just renounced ignoble sentiment. A large part of sympathetic reactions rests in one's sense of being part of a collective—a collective in which the constituent parts have the right to make

[33] Lucy Newlyn, "'In City Pent': Echo and Allusion in Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Lamb, 1797-1801," in *The Review of English Studies*, vol. 32, no. 128, 1981, 408.
[34] Michael O'Neill, *Shelleyan Reimaginings and Influence: New Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 115.

certain demands of each other. The visual element seems to take precedence in Shelley's version of a unified universe.

At the end of Act III of *Prometheus Unbound*, once the utopian project begins to be realized, the importance of the face becomes evident once again. The spirits remark that the masks have fallen away from the visages of humanity, masks that have long been distorting the likenesses of

> Hard-featured men, or with proud, angry looks,
> Or cold, staid gait, or false and hollow smiles,
> Or the dull sneer of self-loved ignorance,
> Or other such foul masks, with which ill thoughts
> Hide that fair being whom we spirits call man (III.IV.41-5).

The fact that humanity appears so ugly and deformed to these immaterial immortals underscores the strange likeness/liking dynamic at work in this lyrical drama. Sympathy, as Shelley reminds us in the "Defence," operates on a recognition of the self in something exterior. Generally, said element of the self is a positive one, but Prometheus' situation reminds us that creatures who manifest or have embraced qualities of the baser order can also exert influence on a subject who is committed to a purely noble way of life. Things that are unpleasant to behold certainly trigger negative feelings upon catching one's eye, but for Shelley's characters these bad feelings are not unmixed with an impulse towards good. When the Spirit of the Earth recalls "those ugly human shapes and visages / Of which I spoke as having wrought me pain" (III.IV.65-6), the prospect of the coming life, where goodness reigns supreme, more than compensates for the previous pain. The Spirit of the Earth rejoices in the crumbling of the masks: "and those / From whom they passed seemed mild and lovely forms / After some foul disguise had fallen, and all / Were

somewhat changed" (III.IV.68-71). The same visages that initially struck fear and revulsion now prove to have concealed beings capable of goodness and loveliness. When evil is eradicated, Shelley seems to say, what is left is the element of goodness, be it small or large, already present in every creature.

Demogorgon, in his final speech, prescribes "Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance" (IV.562) as the means by which to preserve the long-awaited state of peace. The threat of evil remains, however unlikely its renaissance may be. However, the four qualities outlined by Demogorgon work powerfully to discourage the formation of another Jupiter:

> And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,
>
> Mother of many acts and hours, should free
>
> The serpent that would clasp her with his length,
>
> These are the spells by which to reassume
>
> An empire o'er the disentangled doom (IV.565-9).

Here again is the intimation of eternity's capacity to produce anything conceivable by men or gods. The drama as Shelley originally conceived it was meant to end with Act III—all of Act IV then, is an impulse of Shelley's to further describe his ethical project. The vision of utopia is clear-sighted, so in something like the fashion of a user manual, there must be instructions for repairing a fray in the system.

Prometheus Unbound is a study in the ethics and methods of utopian advent. Shelley's drama understands that the champion of a new age of harmony must take a stance towards evil that allows for the hero's virtuous qualities to stand at the fore. In Prometheus' case, it is his sympathetic faculties combined with Stoic resistance to affliction that allow him to uncover a method of dealing with evil and its manifestations. Where the Stoic attitude from which

Prometheus Unbound draws elements of its ethics discourages outward displays of sympathy or the indulgence of unpleasant feelings, the Romantic attitude that Shelley helms in his drama declares that ugly feelings must be acknowledged to a certain extent. Even if unpleasant feelings arise subconsciously, which they frequently do, there is a method of mastery that yet acknowledges the human capacity for negative sentiment. Such self-mastery sets the example for all the creatures who are to participate in utopia.

Yeats asserts that Shelley attempts to compensate for the misfortunes of his life by aggressively putting forth these potential utopian futures. According to him, Shelley "lacked the Vision of Evil, could not conceive of the world as a continual conflict, so, though great poet he certainly was, he was not of the greatest kind."[35] I think that Shelley's Prometheus, contrary to Yeats' summation, manifests an awareness that elements of evil are in fact a part of the heroic self. They must be mastered but cannot be eradicated entirely. Of *Prometheus Unbound* in particular, Yeats declares, "the justice of *Prometheus Unbound* is a vague propagandist emotion and the women that await its coming are but clouds."[36] It is curious that despite his dismissal of Shelley's portrayal of evil, Yeats yet uses language that calls to mind the type of distorted sympathy that Shelley holds forth. Discussing what he terms the "automatism" that operates for Shelley in the stead of poetic invention, Yeats writes, "*Antithetical* men… use this *automatism* to evade hatred, or rather to hide it from their own eyes; perhaps all at some time or other, in moments of fatigue, give themselves up to fantastic, constructed images, or to an almost mechanical laughter."[37] Yeats' "mechanical laughter" operates on a level similar to Shelley's portrayal of distorted sympathies. Earl Wasserman perceives and outlines three factors in

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[35] William Butler Yeats, *A Vision* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1937), 144.
[36] *Ibid.*
[37] *Ibid.*

Shelley's conception of evil: "its unknowable ultimate cause outside the 'system of creation'; a flaw in man's constitution through which it many enter; and the will, which, because of its weakness or through an error of judgement, may fail to maintain its guard over that flaw."[38] The latter two factors that Wasserman enumerates here are crucial to my understanding of Shelley's attitude towards evil and the role that negative sentiment plays in sympathy. Human fallibility is inescapable for Shelley—negative sentiment will always be able to sneak in through the cracks in the human constitution, regardless of the strength of the mind's commitment to goodness.

Previously in this paper, I gestured towards a kind of Shelleyan law of conservation of emotional energy. Everyone has base impulses, impulses that frequently make themselves felt on a subconscious level, but a Shelleyan ethos encourages a rapid conversion of negative into positive or noble sentiment. When strong emotions are in play, Shelley recognizes, there can often remain leftover negative sentiment after a conversion to positive sentiment (such as sympathy) occurs. Carl Grabo also reads Shelley's depictions of strong emotion in *Prometheus Unbound* through the lens of Newtonian physics: "Love, energy, electricity, heat are thought of as one, or as but aspects of the ether which, in Newtonian hypothesis, is the source of energy, life, and matter."[39] In the case of positive and negative sentiments, the mental energy involved is of such a frenetic kind as to make, on occasion, elisions between the former and the latter. So, even in the case of emotions as seemingly disparate as revulsion and sympathy, the mind as Shelley understands it is highly capable of making room for both sentiments simultaneously.

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[38] Wasserman, 107.
[39] Carl Grabo, *Prometheus Unbound: An Interpretation* (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1935), 119.

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